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ABSTRACT

The textbook industry seems to reflect the larger fragmentation of communication channels. When communication, then called speech, was emerging after World War II as a discipline, the instructor ordered Monroe's "Principles and Types of Speech" or one of its lesser competitors. The choices were limited. With the availability of new technologies, more textbooks are being produced in more ways. One particularly intriguing option introduced in recent years is custom publishing, whereby professors gather and write their own material and submit it to a publishing company that binds it but offers little or no editorial guidance. This option offers several possibilities: (1) a professor could collect material and have it published; or (2) a professor could write his or her own text entirely and have it published. Another option is publishing on CD-ROM, but to date, what few CD-ROM disks appear or are in the works are supplementary to the printed text; whole textbooks have yet to appear on disc alone. One of the forces behind the new proliferation of textbook options is the desire of the educator to choose the best text for his or her class. Another force behind this new proliferation is economic: publishers are motivated to sell their texts, while professors and school administrators are attempting to profit through custom publishing. (Contains 12 references.) (TB)

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RETHINKING THE FAMILIARS:

CHANGING TECHNOLOGIES AND PRINT MATERIALS

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Lincoln Steffens was an early twentieth century journalist with socialist leanings who reported on the Russian politics early in this century. In a burst of what we now know to be not only exuberance but terribly bad judgment, he exclaimed, "I have been over into the future and it works!" Having reviewed the situation concerning textbook publication, I am prepared to paraphrase Steffens as a summation of the present situation, "I have been over into the future, and nobody knows what it looks like!"

Textbook publishing is in a state of flux, but no one can accurately predict the what the next stage of evolution will be. It is as if a a number of writers were all working on the same novel, each producing chapters advancing the plot and characters but none of them writing the climax or concluding chapter.

As one might expect, the publishing industry has been strongly affected by the increasing sophistication of electronic technology. The technology has affected the publishing industry in two major ways. One is the development of digital printing process; the other is the dissemination of

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material (Hearings 75). While changes in publishing technology definitely have an impact on textbooks, I will limit my remarks to the dissemination of material as that is where we, as teachers, are most affected.

The Situation

When communication, then speech, was emerging after World War Two as a discipline, life was simpler. When you watched television, you chose the one or two stations broadcasting in your town. When you chose a basic communication text, you bought Monroe's *Principles and Types of Speech* or one of its lesser competitors. Now, we have cable which offers us dozens of channels and textbook publishing which offers us a similar range of choices.

Textbook materials range along a spectrum from traditional textbooks to the do-it-yourself productions. The traditional textbooks are those published by companies with national distribution and sales. These texts are usually revised every three years, utilize a production process of editors, and come with an ancillary package that ranges from the simple (a teacher's manual and a test bank) to the glitzy (videotapes, CD-ROM disks).

At the other end of the scale are the self published materials such as course packets. Instructors choose syllabi, evaluation sheets, readings, and other materials, have them

duplicated at a nearby photocopy shop, and then students either purchase them or pick them up.

In between these two approaches is custom publishing in which a company produces a book from materials supplied by the instructor but with little or not editorial input. Custom publishing appears to be undergoing a major expansion. Tom Gantz of Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, one of the early custom publishers, has observed that when he joined the company eighteen years ago, he had to explain, *ad nauseam*, that Kendall/Hunt was not a vanity publisher but an educational publisher. Today, custom publishing is readily recognized. A number of new companies are coming onto the scene and older, more traditional publishers are adapting custom publishing techniques. McGraw-Hill, for example, has had its Primis program in operation for several years.

Using custom published materials, one may take several approaches. One is to write the book oneself and have it published for one's students. Another is to collect materials into a reader and have the collection published. Here programs such Primis offer the instructor a cafeteria of sources from which to choose: McGraw-Hill materials, material in the public domain, and materials for which they have secured rights. Other custom publishers will aid instructors in obtaining rights to materials which they wish to include.

Electronic technology is a part of these processes either in composition or publishing, but I do not know of a text that has yet leapt totally into "paperless printing." The buzz word of the times is "CD-ROM," but to date, what few CD-ROM disks appear or are in the works are supplementary to the printed text. I find it interesting that in the Fall 1994 edition of *techSource*, a catalog of "business and educational technologies," one finds no listings for "communication" nor for "speech."

The catalog is produced by Business and Educational Technologies of Wm. C. Brown Communications, a sister company of William C. Brown Publishers and Brown and Benchmark. Its existence indicates the interest a publishing company may have in electronic materials. The catalog lists "BandE Tech's" own "electronic book," *Computers: Concepts and Implications*." The "book" is an interactive CD that "provides students with on-line quizzes, searching, notetaking, an illustrated timeline, and more!" It also includes "colorful illustrations and animation." One can imagine a communication text following the same pattern.

Another indication of the interest of publishing companies in the uses of electronic media is the creation of the New Media Center project. In this program, Prentice Hall has joined with several computer hardware and software companies to set up centers at a variety of schools for the

purpose of creating educational materials. One hates to be cynical, but one presumes the interest is not purely altruistic. Should the approach be successful, their products will be in great demand. The descriptive publication, "The New Media Centers Initiative: A Strategy for Fostering Interactive Media in Higher Education", is decidedly vague, though, about what the shape of the new technology will take. Having Re-Thought, What Do We Think?

I am willing to make the bold prediction that we will see more of what we are seeing, that is, a variety of textbooks and materials produced by a variety of means. The drive behind the proliferation of texts, both traditional and tailored, will be two fold. One of the forces will, we hope, be educational. Instructors will instruct their students to purchase the style of text that best suits the class, the teacher, and the students.

The second of the forces will be economic. The traditional textbook publishers will continue to fight for adoptions of their texts. Instructors will be motivated by the possibility of profiting from the publishing business as well. Using a custom published text assures not only that the students are receiving the best and most comprehensive view of communication--our own--but also that we and not some distant author are collecting the royalties. Custom publishing has also been discovered by administrators as a way of collecting

more revenues in these days of financial straits. With the text written by department members on department time, the royalties go to the department.

As one might expect, the present situation offers both positive and negative consequences. On the plus side, the possibilities for custom publishing and self publishing offer instructors the opportunity to create materials suited to a specific course or a specific student body. We are no longer bound by the necessity of selecting a "one size fits all" traditional text. One does not, for example, have to buy a text that contains chapters our course does not cover.

In addition, we can adapt to our specific audiences. My department offers two courses in technological communication. No text exists that covers that subject. One way to solve the problem would be to create our own text or reader or packet that includes appropriate selections, exercises, etc.

The competition from custom publishing and self published materials affects traditional publishers in a positive way. Their products must be highly attractive to outweigh the competition. One need only look at the advertisements for some of the forthcoming books to see the emphasis placed on material, an aesthetic format, and ancillary materials. Several recent books have multiple authors, a sign I believe, that the production of a competitive textbook is such a huge undertaking that the task has to be divided. In addition,

note that teacher's manuals are often created by people other than the authors, usually graduate students hungry for cash and vita entries.

The proliferation of textbook production has its downside as well. One of the major problems may well be quality control. Given the power professors have to designate materials, one may stipulate that students buy one's text no matter what its quality. At least with traditional publishing, the textbook must satisfy an audience of colleagues to be profitable. Custom printing offers the possibility of profits no matter how good or bad the textbook.

The choice of custom publishing or self-publishing also adds to an instructor's responsibilities yet another burden, that of authorship. In addition to producing syllabi and lectures, we have to produce our own books. When and if textbooks are replaced or at least duplicated by CD-ROMs, the task of creating these data base packages of sound, animation, illustrations, and text will entail huge amounts of effort.

If one elects to produce a book created from selections, one runs the risk of discontinuity. As one textbook author has observed, a well written textbook should have a flow with each chapter building on the preceding material (Comer). A collection of readings may not have that crescendo of ideas, and continuity of material will have to be produced by some other means such as the instructor in lectures.

One also has to consider the impact of CD-ROM predicted to be included with textbooks in the near future. The old question arises again, "Are we buying sizzle or are we buying steak?" Are we discovering attractive methods of learning or are we creating programs because we have the ability to create the programs? Having seen programmed learning, new math, open classrooms, audio-tutorial approaches come and go, I wonder. Students are, we know, extremely talented at ignoring what they choose to ignore and capable of learning what they set their minds to learn. How to discourage the one talent and encourage the other is the major question. I will readily admit to not having the answer though the search for an answer is an intriguing one.

So Where Does That Leave Us?

The textbook industry seems to reflect the larger fragmentation of communication channels. We have more choices, but does that mean we have gained? I think the answer is "yes." As the author of a custom published text, I am happy I am not restricted to the traditionally published texts. Are our students better served? That answer depends on what choices we make with textbook selection. We presently have more of those than ever before. As instructors and administrators, it is our duty, and pleasure, to make the most of the possibilities for our students.

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